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## **Navy training virtual desktop installations mark milestone**

PENSACOLA, Fla. -- Naval Education and Training Command (NETC) has hit a milestone in their upgrades of electronic classrooms throughout the Navy's training domain. On April 16 the 3,000<sup>th</sup> virtual desktop was established at the Center for Naval Aviation Technical Training Unit (CNATTU) in Oceana, Va.

The NETC Virtual Desktop Initiative (VDI) was started in 2012 and is deploying new computer systems to more than 23,000 desktop computers in 2,500 classrooms throughout the NETC domain. According to the NETC information technology team, the VDI systems give instructors and students better technology and flexibility in the classroom, which in time will allow them to teach the curriculum at virtually any NETC learning site.

"Users log on, and it knows who they are and can provide the proper content," said Bruce Bare, NETC Information Technology Business Operations department head. The biggest selling points, he says, are flexibility, minimal change to current user experience, and improved security posture.

A student can log into the system from any classroom to the appropriate server and see the appropriate training materials.

“The VDI capability allows CNATT to explore even more innovative ways to support the Fleet,” said Capt. Katherine Erb, commanding officer of CNATT headquarters in Pensacola, Fla. “No longer will many of our courses be tethered to a specific physical location.”

Additionally, an enterprise support team will change or update the operating system, where only the master image receives the updates, then replicates across the system instead of the site technician(s) manually working on potentially hundreds of computers at a learning site. This reduces downtime for computers and increases the efficiency of technicians responsible for maintaining sites.

“We don’t need someone to go around and touch individual machines anymore,” Bare said. “We need fewer information technicians, but they need to have higher skills.”

Maintenance at the training site generally focuses on hardware, meaning technicians are still necessary onsite. Meanwhile, programming and system management moves to one of three planned service centers, which require additional talent.

First implemented at the CNATTU on board Keesler, Air Force Base, Miss., VDI represents a seamless integration in the way content is delivered. Students and instructors use zero clients, basically a monitor, keyboard, and mouse, to access a virtual machine on a server in a secure facility on the base. The zero client stores no operating system or software. The virtual machines stay active yet secure when the user removes their CAC card, allowing them to access their image from any other zero client. Once the user logs off, the virtual instance ends allowing for a pristine image the next time the user logs on.

Most importantly, according to Bare, they're flexible, allowing users to access the same courseware even when using different zero clients or classrooms. This flexibility ensures that training is not bogged down by maintenance or technical problems in one classroom. By the end of the fiscal year, the VDI team expects to have 8 more learning sites running on the new solution, joining the 13 that are already virtualized.

"The ability to streamline IT investments in the long term is very important," Bare said, noting that funding is always a challenge. Bare estimates completion of the unclassified VDI transition by the end of 2017.

"Typically when we go into a site, we have a goal of virtualizing 80 percent of what's there," Bare said. "We've been able to exceed that goal quite well by virtualizing over 90 percent."

Some content, like large databases, don't transfer over to the new system, so the engineers working on VDI have been taking what they can over to the new system and will readdress that content once the transition is complete. The CNATT Detachment at Naval Air Station (NAS) Whiting Field, Fl. completed their transition to VDI in March, according to Lt. James Bailey, who is the director of Aviation Maintenance Officer training and also an instructor. The installation began in January and took about two and half months.

"There's really no difference in the way that I teach," said Bailey.

Bailey is currently teaching his ninth class, each had between 20 and 25 students, and his first using VDI. Having done most of his training on traditional desktops, he appreciates the teamwork that helped implement this new system.

"The VDI team support personnel have been actively engaged with us. When we had questions or weren't sure of things, they wanted to make sure we had the best possible product," Bailey said. "They've been very open to our suggestions and feedback."

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Story by Ensign Jason Buckley, Naval Education and Training Command Public Affairs

